

## Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 019231

FOL RPT TEL AVIV 1029 ACTION SECSTATE INFO AMMAN CAIRO DAMASCUS  
JIDDA LONDON PARIS TEHRAN JERUSALEM USUN NY 23 JAN 78 QUOTE

C O N F I D E N T I A L TEL AVIV 1029

JERUSALEM FOR USDEL

E. O. 11652: GDS  
TAGS: IS EG PBOR PEPR  
SUBJ: PUBLIC REACTION TO BREAK IN NEGOTIATIONS

1. SUMMARY: THE DECISION JANUARY 22 BY THE ISRAELIS  
CABINET TO HOLD-OFF ON FURTHER MEETINGS OF THE MILITARY  
COMMITTEE ACCURATELY REFLECTS THE AMBIVALENCE OF MOST  
ISRAELIS -- THAT BEGIN HAD TO INDICATE HIS DISPLEASURE  
WITH SADAT'S JANUARY 21 SPEECH BUT NOT CLOSE THE DOOR  
COMPLETELY. AS ISRAELIS UNEASILY REFLECT ON THE EVENTS  
OF THE PAST WEEK AND ON WHAT LIES AHEAD, TWO OTHER  
THEMES ARE BEGINNING TO BE HEARD: THAT THE SETTLEMENTS IN  
THE RAFAH AREA SHOULD NOT BE PERMITTED TO BLOCK PROGRESS  
TOWARD PEACE AND FOR THE FIRST TIME SINCE THE PEACE  
PROCESS BEGAN, MURMURS ARE HEARD THAT BEGIN'S LEADERSHIP  
IS BEING QUESTIONED WITHIN THE COALITION. END SUMMARY  
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2. THE STRONGLY WORDED STATEMENT ISSUED BY THE CABINET  
AT THE CONCLUSION OF ITS WEEKLY MEETING JANUARY 22 IS  
PROBABLY AN ACCURATE REFLECTION OF THE VIEW PREVAILING  
IN THE COUNTRY. MOST ISRAELIS PROBABLY AGREE WITH THE  
PRIME MINISTER THAT HE HAD NO ALTERNATIVE BUT TO RESPOND TO  
SADAT'S ASSEMBLY SPEECH SATURDAY NIGHT -- A SPEECH WHICH

IS GENERALLY CONSIDERED TO HAVE BEEN TOUGH AND UNCOMPRO-  
MISING -- ALTHOUGH, AS NOTED BY MANY PRESS EDITORIALS,  
SADAT DID NOT REFER TO THE PLO NOR TO THE FUTURE OF EAST  
JERUSALEM. THE DECISION TO POSTPONE THE DECISION REGARDING  
WEIZMAN'S RETURN TO CAIRO FOR DISCUSSIONS IN THE MILITARY  
COMMITTEE IS ACCEPTED BY MOST ISRAELIS AS THE BEST WAY  
TO INDICATE ISRAEL'S DISPLEASURE WITH RECENT EGYPTIAN MOVES  
AND AT THE SAME TIME ENSURE THAT THE DOOR REMAINS SOME-  
WHAT OPEN.

3. A PHRASE IN A COMMENTARY IN TODAY'S JERUSALEM POST --  
"SEVERAL SETTLEMENTS WITH A FEW HUNDRED FAMILIES IN RAFAH  
AND YAMIT" -- CHARACTERIZES THE DISQUIET OF MANY ISRAELIS  
REGARDING THE POLITICAL POWER OF A FEW SETTLEMENTS AT RAFAH.  
THE THRUST OF THE COMMENTARY IS THAT THESE RELATIVELY FEW  
SETTLEMENTS SHOULD NOT BE PERMITTED TO BLOCK PROGRESS  
TOWARD PEACE AND WE BELIEVE THIS IS AN ASSESSMENT WHICH  
WOULD BE SHARED BY MANY ISRAELIS. IT SHOULD BE NOTED,  
HOWEVER, THAT MOST ISRAELIS WOULD DISTINGUISH BETWEEN  
SETTLEMENTS IN THE NORTHERN SINAI AND THOSE IN WEST BANK;  
THE LATTER WOULD BE DEFENDED MORE VIGOROUSLY IN ANY NEGO-  
TIATIONS. ISRAELIS ARE NEVERTHELESS BEGINNING TO FOCUS MORE  
ON THE SECURITY ASPECTS OF THE RAFAH APPROACHES, AS DISTINCT  
FROM THE SETTLEMENTS THEMSELVES.

4. THIS CONCOMITANT YEARNING FOR PEACE AND CONCERN FOR SEC-  
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URITY MAY EXPLAIN AN AMBIVALENCE ON THE VIEW OF SETTLEMENTS  
AS IN THE MORE GENERAL AREA OF ISRAELI/EGYPTIAN RELATIONS.  
A POLL PUBLISHED YESTERDAY BY THE CENTER FOR APPLIED  
SOCIAL RESEARCH AT HEBREW UNIVERSITY INDICATES THAT 72 PERCENT  
OF THE RESPONDENTS ARE OPPOSED TO THE POSSIBILITY OF  
LEAVING THE RAFAH SETTLEMENTS OUTSIDE ISRAELI BORDERS.  
THE SAME POLL SHOWED THAT 60 PERCENT OF RESPONDENTS ARE  
OPPOSED TO FURTHER SETTLEMENTS ACTIVITY IN THE TERRI-  
TORIES DURING A PERIOD OF NEGOTIATIONS WITH EGYPT. THE  
CONTRADICTION BETWEEN THESE TWO RESPONSES ILLUSTRATES THE  
DIFFICULTY ISRAELIS HAVE IN RECONCILING THEIR FEELING  
THAT SETTLERS SHOULD NOT BE ABANDONED WITH THEIR HOPE THAT  
SETTLEMENTS ACTIVITY WILL NOT DISRUPT NEGOTIATIONS. IN  
GENERAL, IT CAN BE SAID THAT MORE AND MORE ISRAELIS ARE  
TENDING TOWARD THE VIEW THAT SETTLEMENTS IN THE OCCUPIED  
TERRITORIES MAY INDEED BE "OBSTACLES TO PEACE" BUT, AT THE  
SAME TIME, THEY ARE NOT SURE HOW BEST TO PROCEED TO  
OVERCOME THOSE OBSTACLES WITHOUT ABANDONING IMPORTANT PRIN-  
CIPLES. HEREIN LIES THE RUB AND THE CENTRAL REASON FOR THE  
DEVELOPING AMBIVALENCE WE SENSE CONCERNING THE PROBLEM.

5. WE ALSO INCREASINGLY DISCERN A NAGGING CONCERN REGARDING

BEGIN'S LEADERSHIP. PARADOXICALLY, THIS IS MOST EVIDENT AMONG HIS COALITION PARTNERS; PERES HAS REFRAINED FROM CRITICISM AND GOLDA THIS WEEKEND REACTED SHARPLY TO WHAT SHE CONSIDERED EGYPTIAN INSULTS OF BEGIN. BUT, WITHIN THE COALITION WE HAVE BEGUN TO HEAR MURMURS OF DISCONTENT FROM DMC AND THE LIBERALS. FOR EXAMPLE, IN A MEETING OF LIBERAL LEADERS WITH EHRLICH ON JANUARY 19, SEVERAL OF THOSE PRESENT QUESTIONED BEGIN'S EMOTIONALISM DISPLAYED IN HIS DINNER SPEECH LAST WEEK AND IN HIS GENERAL INSENSITIVITY TO ISRAEL'S INTERNATIONAL IMAGE.

6. THE INCIPIENT CONCERN WITH BEGIN'S LEADERSHIP IS PARTICULARLY NOTICEABLE WITH REGARD, AGAIN, TO THE ISSUE OF SETTLEMENTS; HERE HIS STATEMENTS AND ACTIONS REFLECT HIS CONFIDENTIAL

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INABILITY OR UNWILLINGNESS TO DEAL WITH RELIGIOUS AND NATIONALIST MILITANTS. BEGIN COULD EFFECTIVELY DEAL WITH THESE MILITANTS, BUT THAT WOULD BEST BE DONE BY SHIFTING FROM HIS PRESENT RELIANCE ON HERUT/NRP HARDLINERS TO A MORE FLEXIBLE LIBERAL/DMC GROUPING. HE IS RELUCTANT TO DO THIS BECAUSE OF THE IMPACT ON HIS LOYAL FOLLOWERS AND BECAUSE OF HIS PERSONAL BELIEFS. IN SUM, WHILE THERE IS NO THREAT TO BEGIN NOR ANYTHING APPROACHING A REVOLT, THE PRESENT PERIOD OF PUBLIC NERVOUSNESS AND APPREHENSION INEVITABLY SPILLS OVER ON TO THE PRIME MINISTER AND HIS PERFORMANCE. LEWIS

UNQUOTE VANCE

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## Message Attributes

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